

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



## CHAPTER XX

# Benjamin Franklin

1706-1790

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN was one of the most famous men that America has ever produced. His life covers the greater part of the last century. He was born in Boston, at that time the largest town in all the English colonies, but having less than ten thousand people.

There were then ten colonies along the coast. Baltimore had not been settled, nor New Orleans. There were no railroads, and not even a stage-coach in the country. At that time there were three colleges and but one newspaper.

How different was America when Franklin died, an old man, eighty-four years of age. The Revolutionary War had been fought, the Constitution of the United States had been adopted, and Washington had become President. At the birth of Franklin the population of this country was probably less than half a million. At his death it was nearly ten times as great.

Franklin was a self-educated man. He went to school only two years, leaving it when he was ten years of age. At that time he went into his father's candle-shop to help make

candles for the people of Boston. He did not like this occupation and soon grew tired of it. Then his father apprenticed him to his brother James, who published a newspaper. Franklin liked this business better.

While Franklin was at work for his brother, one of his duties was to deliver the papers to subscribers. One day, in hurrying around a corner of the street, he suddenly ran against the table where an old woman was selling apples, and the apples rolled off upon the sidewalk. Benjamin picked them up and made his apologies to the old lady. She was pleased with his intelligence and began to talk to him.

"Do you ever dream, my little man?" she said. "Oh, yes," he replied, "I dream sometimes when I've eaten too much supper." "Well, do you believe in dreams?" "Oh, yes," said Franklin, "I believe in dreams—that is, I believe that I dream and other people dream." "Yes," said she, "but do your dreams come true?" "Well, no. I don't think they do usually. Do yours?" "Oh, yes," said the old lady, "my dreams always come true, and I dreamed about you last night." "Did you? Well, what did you dream?" "I dreamed that you bought this book and that you became a very wise man." "Well, well! Indeed, what is the book?" and he picked it up and looked at it. "How much do you ask for it?" "Only sixpence, sir." "Well, I think it would be too bad for your dream not to prove true just for sixpence, so I will buy it."

He went away with this book, which was a copy of the third volume of Addison's "Spectator." With the book he was delighted. He was charmed not only with the thought, but with the elegant way in which it was expressed. He would read one of the short papers, close the book, and rewrite it, partly in his own language. Then, comparing his



work with Addison's, he was quite inclined to say that Addison's was the better. In this way he found that a good deal depends upon how thoughts are expressed, and he began to study style.

If you will read his autobiography, you will find that he tells in a charming way how he left Boston when he was



YOUNG FRANKLIN LAUGHED AT BY HIS FUTURE WIFE.

seventeen years old, went to New York, and from there to Philadelphia. You will be greatly interested in his story of how he walked up Market Street, Sunday morning, with a loaf of bread under each arm and munching a third, and how Miss Read stood at the door of her father's house laughing at him. Then you will find afterward that this same Miss Read became Mrs. Benjamin Franklin.

Franklin's first visit to England was when he was eighteen years of age. On reaching London he sought for work in a printing-office. The foreman said: "Where are you from?" Franklin replied: "From America." "From America!" says the printer. "And can you set type?" "Try me and see," said Franklin.

He took the composing-stick in his hand, examined the case of types, noticing that the letters were arranged in the

boxes in the same way that they were in America, and within four minutes he set with perfect accuracy the following sentences:

"Nathaniel said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see."

When he was twenty years of age he returned to Philadelphia, and really began his life-work in that city. He published a newspaper when he was twenty-three years old; he kept a stationery shop, and soon began to publish "Poor Richard's Almanac."

This almanac brought him large profits, and he continued it for many years. "Poor Richard's Almanac" contained a great many homely maxims, which made it very popular and which had a good influence upon the habits and morals of the people. Here are a few of these maxims:

"Then plough deep while sluggards sleep,  
And you shall have corn to sell and to keep."

"Vessels large may venture more,  
But little boats should keep near shore."

"Handle your tools without mittens: remember that the cat in gloves catches no mice."

"The sleeping fox catches no poultry."

"Diligence is the mother of good luck, and God gives all things to industry."

"Silks and satins,  
Scarlet and velvets,  
Put out the kitchen fire."

"Many estates are spent in getting,  
Since women for tea forsook spinning and knitting,  
And men for punch forsook hewing and splitting."



"He that by the plough would thrive  
Himself must either hold or drive."

Franklin rose rapidly in the esteem of the people. He was chosen to fill many offices; he was postmaster of Philadelphia and a member of the city government; he was clerk as well as representative to the legislature; and he was postmaster-general for the English colonies.

He also served the people by his great inventions; he sent a kite up in a thunder-storm and showed that lightning was the same as electricity; he made the Franklin stove, which proved much better than the old-fashioned large fireplaces. He desired to aid education as far as possible; he founded the University of Pennsylvania, and he started the first public library in Philadelphia.

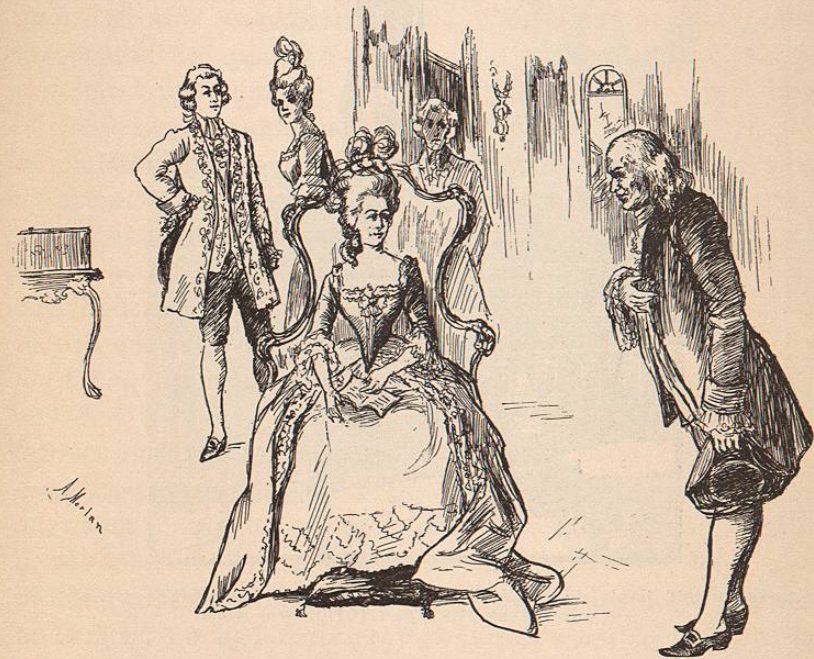
When Franklin had become greatly interested in his studies, they were interrupted by the struggle which led up to the Revolutionary War. Franklin was appointed by the people of Pennsylvania as their representative to the British Government. From this time onward his mind and time were mostly occupied in public affairs.

Franklin tried his best to prevent the passage of the Stamp Act, but it was passed and the necessary results followed. The Stamp Act led to the next step, and that to the next, and so on, until the Revolution came, which ended in the independence of the colonies. Franklin was one of the last to believe that independence was necessary. Still, when the time came, Franklin heartily yielded and signed the Declaration of Independence.

Franklin was sent to France to represent the government of the new republic at the Court of Paris. The war went on; the contest was uneven between this little republic with its small army and the great power of England with its experi-

enced generals. But Washington overcame the difficulties, and the army was finally victorious through the help of France, which Franklin by his genius and popularity had secured. Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown and the war was at an end.

Next came the treaty of peace with Great Britain. In that treaty the most important question was what should be our



FRANKLIN AND THE QUEEN OF FRANCE.

western boundaries. Franklin and John Jay of New York finally succeeded in securing for this country the territory north of the Ohio, so carrying the western bounds of the republic to the Mississippi River.



Franklin was now an old man. Soon after the making of this treaty he returned to his native land for the last time. Yet he had strength enough to engage in one more great work for his country. When he was bowed down by the



"INDEPENDENCE HALL," IN PHILADELPHIA, WHERE INDEPENDENCE WAS DECLARED IN 1776, AND WHERE THE CONSTITUTION WAS MADE.

burden of more than four-score years, he was appointed by the State of Pennsylvania as a member of that great convention which was to frame the Constitution of the United States of America.

For four months during the heat of summer Franklin daily met with his colleagues in the old state-house in Phila-

delphia, in "Independence Hall," giving to his country those wise counsels which came from his long life and varied experiences, his great mental ability, and his remarkable genius. This convention had a very difficult task to perform. The delegates represented different States, under different conditions, and it was almost impossible to agree upon a new Constitution that would be approved by the States they represented.

More than a month passed by before any successful agreement had taken place among the members. One morning when the convention had assembled, Franklin arose and said:

"How has it happened, sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard; and they were graciously answered. Have we now forgotten that powerful Friend, or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, sir, a long time; and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, *that God governs in the affairs of men.* And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground



FRANKLIN AT THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION.



without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

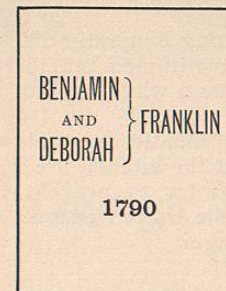
The convention finally succeeded in framing a Constitution that all could agree to. It was not perfect, but it was clearly the best that could be obtained. Franklin said of it, in a speech to the convention just before the vote was taken: "Thus I consent, sir, to this Constitution, because I expect no better and because I am not sure that this is not the best."

While the different members of the convention were signing the Constitution, Franklin stood rubbing his eye-glasses and looking toward the president's chair, on the back of which was represented the sun upon the horizon, shooting its slanting rays upward. Franklin turned to the member standing near him, and remarked that painters have found it difficult to distinguish in their art a rising from a setting sun. "I have," said he, "often and often, in the course of the session and the vicissitudes of my hopes and fears as to its issue, looked at that picture behind the president without being able to tell whether the sun was rising or setting; but now at length I have the happiness to know that the sun of America is rising."

Franklin continued to exert himself for the public good until the very end of his life. Just before his death he signed a memorial to Congress, praying for the abolition of slavery in the United States, and the very day before he died, in the midst of extreme suffering, he finished a paper upon this subject. His age was a little above eighty-four years.

Without question, Benjamin Franklin was one of the greatest men of his age. When the news of his death reached France, the National Assembly put on mourning. The Frenchman, Turgot, said of Franklin: "He snatched the thunderbolt from the sky and the sceptre from tyrants."

Franklin and his wife were buried in the graveyard of Christ Church, Philadelphia, at the corner of Fifth and Arch Streets. Over the two graves is a large stone slab, bearing this inscription:



When Franklin was a young man and a printer in Philadelphia, he wrote his own epitaph:

THE BODY  
OF  
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,  
PRINTER,

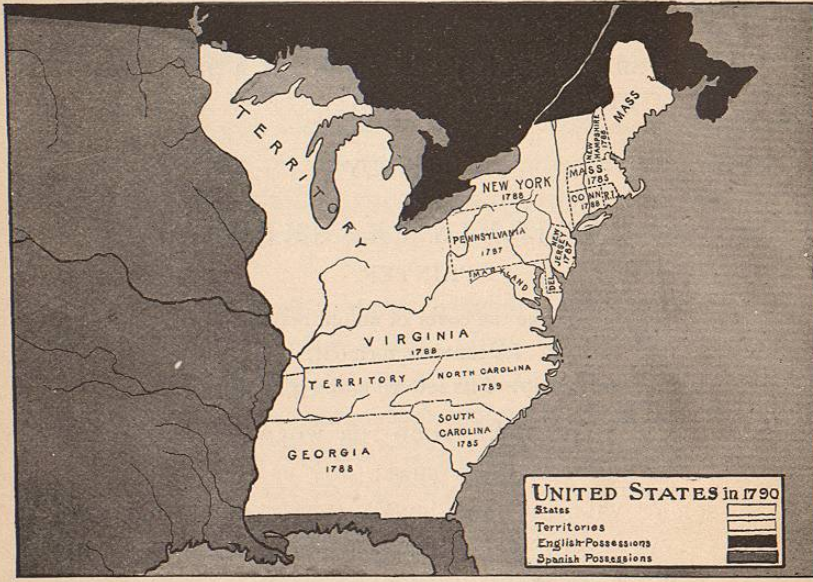
(Like the cover of an old book,  
Its contents torn out,  
And stript of its lettering and gilding.)

LIES HERE, FOOD FOR WORMS.  
BUT THE WORK SHALL NOT BE LOST,  
FOR IT WILL (as he believed) APPEAR ONCE MORE,  
IN A NEW AND MORE ELEGANT EDITION,  
REVISED AND CORRECTED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR.

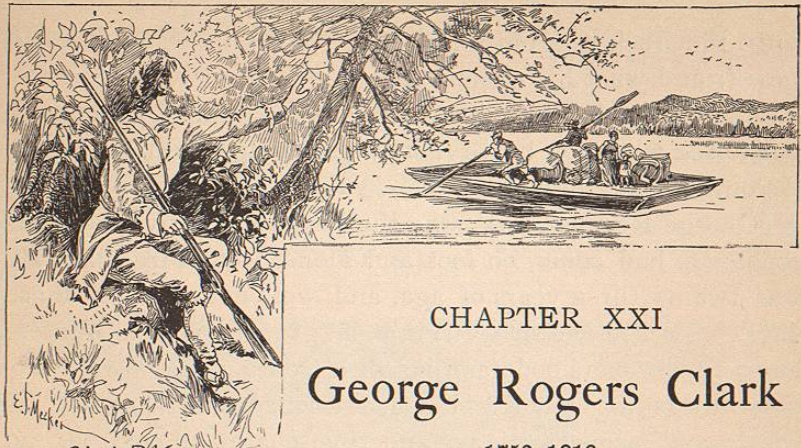


State some of the changes in American life that Franklin saw.  
 Tell the story of the book and its value to Franklin.  
 Give an account of "Poor Richard's Almanac."  
 State some of the ways in which Franklin served his countrymen.  
 Tell what Franklin had to do with the Stamp Act; with the Declaration of Independence; with the Treaty of Peace; with the Constitution of the United States.

Why do you suppose young Benjamin disliked the candle business? What different things are mentioned that helped Franklin to become a writer? Do you understand why Franklin set up those particular sentences for the London printer? What do we mean by "homely" maxims? Why should we "handle our tools without mittens"? How do "silks and satins put out the kitchen fire"? Who passed the Stamp Act and how did Franklin try to prevent its passage? What did Franklin do in France for the United States? Why was Franklin one of the greatest men of his age?



THE YOUNG NATION AT ITS START.



CHAPTER XXI  
**George Rogers Clark**  
 1752-1818

A FEW days after General Washington and his little patriotic army entered Boston, in the spring of 1776, a young boy was hurriedly walking along a trail in the woods of what is now Kentucky. As he passed a spring, bubbling up by the side of the path, he saw a wild duck drinking the cool waters. Like every pioneer boy, he was an expert shot, and in a few moments the duck was roasting over a fire which the boy had kindled.

Suddenly the youth was startled by the sound of a step; but it was a firm tread, not the stealthy glide of an Indian moccasin. Looking up, he saw a young, soldierly appearing man approaching; a man "square-built, thick-set, with high, broad forehead, and sandy hair." The newcomer briskly called out:

"How do you do, my little fellow? What is your name? Ar'n't you afraid of being in the woods by yourself?"

The voice of the stranger was pleasing and cordial. The boy felt no fear of him, and invited him to taste the duck. The man was evidently hungry, for he continued to taste